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ABSTRACT

An alternative model, the Program of Research and Evaluation for Public Schools (PREPS), provides specialized educational services to local public schools. PREPS is funded directly by member school districts with additional funds from Mississippi State University. This sponsorship allows each member school to select, design, and conduct research on problems of its choice. Focus of the program is on creating a self-renewing, system-improvement capacity within each of the member school districts. A basic strength of the program is the joint governance of specialists on the PREPS staff and school district superintendents. All activities are focused on creating a critically needed data base for each member school district to use in making decisions about its curriculum, instruction, and business management. A key element in the success of the program has been that PREPS serves the school district and does not force external ideas. There is also an ongoing, interactional relationship between PREPS staff and local decision makers, and school districts have willingly participated and cooperated with PREPS staff. Another successful element has been PREPS' collaborative task force approach to solving problems. (JD)

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EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS: AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL -- PREPS

by

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Paper. The primary purpose of this paper is to present an alternative model for providing specialized educational services, including inservice activities for personnel, to local public schools. A secondary purpose is to encourage readers of this paper to offer suggestions and recommendations for revising the model so that services to public schools can be improved and/or expanded in a collaborative fashion.

Scope of the Paper. The paper addresses the broader aspects of: (1) the conceptual validity and operational feasibility of the model; (2) the planning environment, including operations, policy guidance, available options, adequacy of planning, resources, preparation, and support; (3) the conduct of activities demanded by the model and accomplishments to data; and (4) the future plans, expansions, and new initiatives of the agency that has come to be known as PREPS.

The Concept. In the latter part of 1975, Dr. Clyde Muse (then superintendent of Meridian (MS) Public Schools, now president of Hinds Junior College) called Dr. Merrill M. Hawkins (then dean of the College of Education at Mississippi State University, since retired, now director of development for Wood Junior College) to discuss the possibility of receiving some assistance in acquiring data for use in making revisions in the various curricula in his and other school systems of the state. Dr. Muse stated that he had been in numerous discussions with many school administrators operating in various capacities at different educational levels across the state, and the consensus was that building a base of sound decision-making data was and still is the first priority of all educational personnel who desired to improve educational practice. MSU was

asked to help render this assistance because of its commitment to service as a land grant institution.

Dr. Hawkins directed his associate dean for research and development (co-author of this paper, James E. Wall) to study the concept, document the need and draft a rationale for such a program, suggest ways for financing such a venture, and recommend a name for the program. After considerable discussion of the mission and activities of this prospective program, the acronym PREPS was derived from Program of Research and Evaluation for Public Schools, and serves as a "catchy" term that has come to be a by-word in our state.

During the spring and summer of 1976, descriptions of the potential impact that PREPS might make were sent to all 152 school superintendents in Mississippi in an attempt to recruit their school districts as charter members of the newly formed consortium. By July of 1976, some 10 school districts had tentatively committed themselves to membership. Clearly, more detailed descriptions of activities, governance, and expected benefits to consortium members were needed by the superintendents before the membership would increase dramatically. Furthermore, it was recognized that a full-time director of PREPS was needed to develop and maintain close and continuous interaction with school districts.

During these early developmental stages several factors seemed to be working against PREPS before it got into full swing. PREPS was faced with a relatively continually changing set of circumstances that was being strongly influenced by the unsureness of unconvinced superintendents to join such a unique consortium. In addition, the vacillating positions of uncertain, unassured resource agencies, which earlier had tentatively committed themselves to PREPS development, began to erode its support base.

As mentioned before, a full-time PREPS director was needed and active recruitment for such a person began to be taken more seriously. These recruitment efforts culminated in Dr. Thomas H. Saterfiel assuming the position of director of PREPS in September of 1976. Saterfiel, operating from his specialization of institutional research, began immediately to convince doubters of the efficacy and viability of the PREPS model. Through his efforts the original ten school districts consummated memoranda of agreement setting forth a basic understanding between member school districts and Mississippi State University (MSU). PREPS became a formalized cooperative and collaborative venture between MSU and local public school districts that numbered ten in 1976, 16 in 1977, 20 in 1978, 24 in 1979, 27 in 1980, 31 in 1981, and 30 in 1982. PREPS operating costs at the outset were cooperatively provided by member public school districts and MSU, with annual dues being assessed at a basic rate of $1400.00/yr. for each member school and with MSU providing office space, favorable computer rates, and other amenities. These arrangements have continued during the seven years PREPS has been in operation.

To say that PREPS almost "died a-borning" would be putting it mildly. Operating against acceptance of the PREPS concept were: (1) the misperceived "geographic remoteness" of the MSU Campus from most school districts; (2) the provincial and parochial attitudes and downright skepticism of some superintendents, principals, teachers, and school board members; (3) the general national disenchantment with our public school system; and (4) the emerging harsh criticisms of public education's staff development system, which many believe is not working at all as an effective inservice strategy. These are but a few of the circumstances

that caused the relatively slow generation of a viable organization that would be capable of delivering the diverse services that schools kept saying they needed. Nevertheless, this gradual growth gave us time to reflect on such things as PREPS governance; optimal size of PREPS central office staff; diversity of needed staff expertise; more closely coordinated agency interactions; detailed planning for joint training of local school district personnel in research and evaluation skills, and later in test development techniques; better planning for each PREPS annual research sharing conference; better command/control of PREPS project operations at the school district level; a centralized and integrated information exchange system; and the like.

Recognizing the need for additional staff with high caliber expertise, active recruitment for a second PREPS central staff member began in the spring of 1977, and in September Dr. David T. Morse, test and measurement specialist, assumed the position of PREPS assistant director. Later on he spearheaded the test development consortium in response to an expressed need of more than 60% of the PREPS schools. He currently leads the microcomputer activities being conducted among the PREPS schools.

Issues Addressed Early by the PREPS Model.

Issue 1. Most existing agencies that provide education services to local public schools are supported predominantly by either state and/or federal funds. But funds currently supporting PREPS come directly from its member school districts, with additional funds being supplied by the College of Education, and in-kind contributions by the MSU administration. This "grass-roots," individual-school sponsorship allows each member school to select, design, and conduct research on problems of its choice.

Issue 2. Most existing education services agencies confine their "sphere of influence" to a region, a district, or some other boundary-defined geographic area within a given state. Conversely, PREPS operates statewide and any of the remaining non-member 122 school districts in Mississippi may join the consortium, subject, of course, to the approval of the current PREPS Advisory Council.

Issue 3. Most existing education services agencies usually have staff development as their primary function. On the other hand, PREPS at the outset rejected the staff development function as its prime mission for the following reasons. (1) Staff development activities usually are not evaluated according to dependent variables, such as cognitive, affective, performance, and consequence. (2) Staff development has usually focused on merely improving the specific skills of a few teachers. (3) Staff development has usually been confined to a single annual activity staged at the beginning of the school year in which a paid consultant comes to "lead" the inservice session. (Paid consultants are notoriously of the IPE variety; i.e., upon initial arrival for a school inservice session, they inspire. Midway through the inservice session they begin to lag, run out of jokes and anecdotes, and perspire. And finally, when the futility of their efforts is recognized, they expire, return to their home institution and are no longer available to the teachers during implementation of what the teachers were supposed to have learned. To put it even more succinctly, consultants too often merely blow in, blow off, and blow out; their availability to the school on a sustained basis is absent.) In only a few instances is the consultant arrangement a viable model, mainly because it presents the schools with some difficult problems; such as: (1) the local school must find a consultant who is interested in working on its particular

problem; (2) time must be arranged for the consultant to provide the inservice work while simultaneously carrying out all the other duties assigned to him/her at the university; and (3) the school must maintain a continuous relationship with the consultant. Frequently, by the time the local school has developed a good working relationship with a consultant, the consultant leaves or takes on new duties which prevent the continuation of service to the school. Some people are suggesting that private consulting firms can best supply this service. True, metropolitan areas of the country could probably support such a private business; however, very few private education consulting firms that deliver research and evaluation services concentrate on rural America.

To offset this problem, PREPS makes its staff members available anytime, by phone, by personal visits to schools at least twice each year and more frequently if requested, by contact through workshops, and by local school personnel visits to the PREPS central office.

By now it should be obvious to the readers that PREPS is dedicated to creating a self-renewing, system-improvement capacity within each of its member school districts. It has chosen not to emphasize only the classic staff development/inservice training model that focuses solely on teacher improvement strategies. Likewise, PREPS recognized early that focusing only on the technical rationality of change in terms of program goals, means, and evidence is not sufficient for self-renewal; so it began to emphasize both the social and the personal conditions of change; i.e., the existing culture of each PREPS member school. The culture of any school is comprised of actors, actions, and associations. The actors are the policy-maker and developers (administrators) on the one hand, and the

implementers (teachers) on the other. Actions are the school's programs, and the associations are the interactions of all the persons in the school.

PREPS recognized that all teachers need to be helped to move toward a point where they become vitally concerned about the impact of their teaching on pupils. This concern is reflected in expressed need for the creation and maintenance of a data base in each school. The mission of PREPS, then, became one of providing research, evaluation, test development, and microcomputer services -- and the technologies surrounding each of these -- to each member school district for its use in the decision-making (change) process.

Issue 4. Most small school districts do not have sufficient resources available to hire specialists in the areas of research, evaluation, testing, and microcomputers. However, PREPS is based on the premise that small school districts can do some things cooperatively, collaboratively, and collectively that they would otherwise be unable to do individually. Thus far, PREPS has limited its services to research, evaluation, test development, and, recently, microcomputers. PREPS has never visualized itself as a panacea for all the ills of a local school, but it can and will do anything that a member school district wants to do, if it wants to do it badly enough and sets the activity as top priority. All PREPS activities are focused on creating a critically needed data base for each member school district to use in making decisions about its curriculum, instruction, and business management affairs; which, in turn, allows PREPS schools to address the problem of accountability.

Issue 5. Most existing education services agencies suffer from lack of appropriate input from teachers at the practice implementation level. But teachers in local schools who are working on PREPS projects are

collaborators in the truest sense of the term. For most of them, being involved with a PREPS project is the first opportunity they have had to engage in research and evaluation, to think about why they teach as they do, and to understand the need for a sound data base for use in making decisions about teaching. They have found their PREPS experiences useful to themselves and they tend to pass useful information on to other teachers in their school system, because PREPS concentrates on the collective efforts of the entire school faculty; i.e., program goals instead of individual or personal goals. And yet, PREPS also emphasizes individual teacher responsibility for engaging in self-instruction, peer study groups, college courses for credit, workshop attendance, personal contact with experts, and the like. In fact, teachers in PREPS schools compete with each other to see who gets to attend test development workshops and research sharing conferences.

Issue 6. Most existing education services agencies are hindered by an inappropriate governance structure. PREPS recognized early that certain policies must be set and adhered to if mutual benefits were to be derived for all parties concerned. The proactive leadership exhibited by PREPS school superintendents has been the prime ingredient in any successes achieved thus far. These superintendents serve as the PREPS Advisory Council. The Council performs two major functions: (1) they determine directions and activities of PREPS; and (2) they advise the dean of the MSU College of Education on current issues in the public schools and education in general.

As part of the governance structure, PREPS is organized as a special program in the Bureau of Educational Research and Evaluation (BERE) located in the College of Education at MSU. School districts join as members by

paying an annual membership fee that entitles them to a common set of services. Should a member school wish to purchase additional services, it can do so based on a standard fee schedule. Each school then appoints one person within its district to serve as the coordinator for the local program. This person is responsible for the conduct of all activities associated with PREPS in that district.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF PREPS

Basic Services.

The PREPS Advisory Council sets the basic membership fee and decides upon a fee schedule for the purchase of additional services. The Council also establishes the basic services that will be made available to member schools. These basic services generally fall into three categories.

In the first category, the PREPS Advisory Council selects each year one overall research project which they feel will have the greatest collective impact for all the member districts. Each member district then cooperates by either providing subjects or data which are utilized in the research project.

The second category of services, and the most important one according to the schools, is the local project. Each district selects one project which it feels will be most useful in providing the data it needs for making decisions withing the district. Once the problem is identified and defined, PREPS staff members aid in designing the study. They also help in the data collection process, the statistical analyses, and any other relevant procedures. Local staff are trained to carry out much of the research work, thus reducing the external cost to the district. In addition, two onsite visits are scheduled each year by the PREPS staff to monitor the progress of the local project and to provide assistance when

necessary. In addition, each member district is provided access to a toll-free telephone line on which they can call at any time to discuss questions they may have. PREPS staff members also aid in data interpretation and frequently make reports to school staffs and school board members.

The third category of PREPS activities is an education function which is directed at promoting the delivery of good data to be used in the decision-making process. F summer each district presents its local research project in a "Rese..ch Sharing Conference." Much to the delight of the PREPS staff, this conference has become the highlight of the year as public school nersonnel have the opportunity to share their problems and their plans for solving these problems based on the data provided through their local projects. A second effort under the education function is the "Fall Training Workshop." Each year the superintendents and coordinators are surveyed to identify the training needs they view as most important. Based on this input, a three-day workshop is planned where technical research and evaluation training is provided to the participants so that they can become more effective in their local districts. A member school district is allowed to send as many local staff members as it wishes to the Fall Training Workshop. We have had as many as 120 participants from the districts in these workshops.

In the 1979-80 academic year, PREPS offered a new option to member school districts. With the Mississippi accountability law calling on all schools to develop local evaluative instruments to measure a program in terms of stated objectives, the superintendents felt training in test construction would be beneficial. Therefore, each district choosing to participate in this special option sends from 2 to 6 teachers in a limited

discipline area to a week long test development training program. During the training, basic principles of test construction are taught along with procedures for developing a test. During the following year, each local school team develops and field tests an evaluative instrument in a chosen area. This process provides the team with the skills and confidence to pursue other test construction activities within its district. This training is valuable, and it is one example of how PREPS is providing technical assistance upon the request of the member school districts.

PREPS Accomplishments.

The various overall PREPS projects conducted in the past six years have covered a wide range of topics. Few have been more important than the one conducted during the first year of PREPS operations. The first overall project was to determine the association of various factors with basic skills achievement test scores in Mississippi. The results indicated that 75% of the variance in fifth grade reading scores could be explained by the socio-economic level of the parents of the school's children. This one finding led Mississippi to change its State Assessment Program from one which provided grade equivalent scores and rankings of school districts in terms of raw achievement, to one which utilizes a standardized aptitude test in conjunction with the achievement test, and reports school districts as significantly above, below, or not significantly different from their projected achievement scores. Needless to say, this change pleased superintendents.

The individual local school projects have also been effective. Several districts have used PREPS to conduct follow-up studies of graduates or to collect attitudinal data from the community as a vital link in the planning process. Other districts have found themselves faced with a

decision as to whether to eliminate duplicate programs and have used PREPS to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs to provide data which were then used in the final decision process. One school district used a longitudinal study of achievement in its schools to terminate a law suit which alleged that children in one of its schools were being provided an inferior program. Finally, PREPS has also aided school districts by providing the evaluation of such federal programs as Title I remedial programs. The decision about the local project belongs to the local school district. Although all the local projects may not have produced studies worthy of being published in national journals, most of them are found at the heart of the decision-making process within the local district. The experience of PREPS supports the idea that local decision makers will use good data in making a decision if it is made available to them in a form they can use. Providing results which address the local needs is probably one of the most important attributes of PREPS.

Each school is responsible for establishing its own controls over the local project effort each year within the general guidelines established by the PREPS Advisory Council. The negotiation of the local project description is conducted between the superintendent or local coordinator from the district and the director of PREPS. The Council has a chairman and vice-chairman, with the director of PREPS serving as the executive secretary.

The PREPS staff focuses on helping the local district conduct projects which will meet the local school needs. Often times the project selection is made by the administrators of a school district in a meeting with the PREPS staff. The PREPS staff is comprised of three professionals who are specialists in the areas of statistics, research design, measurement,

evaluation, and institutional research. The staff seeks not only to pursue topics of both general and specific interest, but also to ask the types of questions that will yield a study which will address the decision-maker's needs. However, while seeking to meet the decision-maker's needs, the staff works to maintain a quality control factor in the design and use of the data. Hence, the PREPS staff actually functions as an assistant superintendent for research and evaluation in each school district. The only limiting factor is the financial resources which the school can contribute to the purchase of services.

In addition to producing a final report for the local research or evaluation project conducted in the district, PREPS provides other services for the basic fee. A PREPS staff member spends two days each year upon request in the local district talking to school staff and reviewing the implementation of the local project. Each year, there are three meetings that are held concerning PREPS and they are open to all the school personnel who wish to attend. During the spring conference, new ideas are explored and districts share plans for future programs. The summer meeting allows districts to present the results of their local research projects for the past year. A guest educational researcher of national repute is usually invited to the meetings to react to the local projects and to present a keynote address. Finally, the fall meeting is a training workshop where local staff members can attend short seminar sessions to sharpen their research and evaluation skills.

One special project of PREPS that has been popular among member schools is test development. Under this plan a team of two to six staff members from each school attends an intensive week-long workshop on how to develop good teacher-made evaluation instruments. Each team selects one

instruction section to use in developing an evaluation plan and instrument during the next school year. With the leadership of a PREPS staff member, the teams create these plans and then share the results with all the other active teams. This activity not only yields some new evaluation instruments but it also prepares these people to be leaders in evaluation in their districts. The improvement of classroom evaluation is a major priority of the PREPS school districts.

There are many benefits which PREPS offers to its member schools. First, the school can receive long-range, systematic help in research and evaluation without having to create an office of research and evaluation in each school. Secondly, the school is relieved of the responsibility of all the management and personnel problems caused by governing a large cooperative agency. Since PREPS is paid for by the member schools, the participants are leading the development of services as opposed to following the results of state-level or even federal decisions which may not fit their particular situations. Finally, the schools' association with the University lends credibility to the organization and allows them to be more effective in communicating the results of their studies and in acting on these results.

The University likewise reaps many benefits from this consortium arrangement. Many administrators have stated that the positive public relations aspects of PREPS cannot be calculated in dollar amounts. In addition, with shrinking college enrollments and dollars, a PREPS arrangement identifies new sources of funds which can be used to maintain quality staff at a full-time level of employment. The PREPS arrangement is obviously a fertile field for research with a built-in laboratory of functioning schools which are seeking to find answers to unique as well as

common problems. Many higher education institutions would like to have available for research the open access to 160,000 students in 30 different school districts. The reason PREPS has this access is that it works for the schools to meet their needs as opposed to presenting itself as the answer to all the problems the schools may have.

FUTURE OF PREPS

There are problems associated with the PREPS model, most of which relate to financial resources. When PREPS started to deliver economical services, the fees were so low that the bills could not be paid. Caution should be used in not underpricing services just to help schools financially. When services are underpriced, the resulting strain on providing quality services may cause the schools more harm than the additional financial requirements would have caused. Any University or consortium of schools giving consideration to initiation of the PREPS model should give careful consideration to establishing a sound financial base which can assure the life of the program. Currently, PREPS is seeking funds from private industry sources to help underwrite this program in Mississippi.

A second problem is one of control. While the PREPS plan clearly explains who is to do what, it often does not work that way. An active chairman of the Advisory Council who interacts with the top University officials can do much to solve the problem of control. However, it is unwise to expect the program staff to be able to speak for the schools at the University level. After all, under the PREPS plan they are just employees of the University like everyone else on campus.

Finally, there needs to be careful attention paid to the selection of staff members to work with the PREPS model. While academic talent is critical, it is not sufficient to make the program successful. There must

also be good public relations in working with people and in being a salesman in order for the program to grow. Pride in satisfying the schools is also a necessity. Unfortunately, not all educational researchers can live in this kind of environment. In addition, working in a PREPS environment is very demanding and University officials must realize the differences in traditional academic teaching positions and the research/service positions of PREPS staff members. It is possible to burn out an excellent staff member before realizing what is happening. PREPS staff members also teach courses in their respective areas of specialization.

There is little doubt that a well-financed intermediate unit with a comprehensive research and evaluation office can provide good service to its member districts. But for those parts of the country that lack the finances but have the desire, the PREPS model allows research and evaluation services to be delivered to interested schools. There is little that is surprising in the philosophy of PREPS or that is unique in the problems it faces. The unique factor is that PREPS is now entering its seventh year of service to the public schools of Mississippi. PREPS was not a federal demonstration project, but an action taken by local school administrators and paid for out of local school budgets. This experience supports the idea that research and evaluation services can be developed, even in rural America where finances are short, but desire is long.

Expansion of services.

PREPS has several areas of service which can be addressed in the future as the organization grows. One obvious service would be to provide a management information system (MIS) which could be used by districts to maintain finances, student grades, personnel files, and even inventory. Systematic reports from such a system would not only eliminate much work

for personnel within the district, such as making the payroll or filling out regular grade reports, but could provide needed management data on a regular basis. In addition, with a MIS, collecting data for research and evaluation studies would require only a simple computer routine. Most universities that have computer centers are eager to find external users of the system. The public schools would be logical organizations to expand computer use. In addition, they would be easy to justify to the public when funding considerations are discussed.

Another area which could provide promise for future growth is the development of an evaluation center. This center would contain item banks for achievement tests, test banks for special units of instruction, and the capability of aiding local districts in evaluating their instructional programs by providing aid in constructing good evaluative instruments based on local instructional objectives. Both of these growth areas would require more money from the member school districts. In the end the priority the school district places on these services will determine whether they are provided for by PREPS or not.

Keys to PREPS Success.

The PREPS concept has been successful for Mississippi public schools and for Mississippi State University. Several other institutions are considering implementation of the PREPS model. To assure success of the PREPS model there are a few simple, but crucial points to be remembered.

First, and foremost, PREPS exists to serve the school districts, not to force some external ideas on the school. When a PREPS staff member enters a school district, he/she assumes the role of an assistant superintendent for research and evaluation with the primary goal being that of acquisition of good data to aid in the decision-making process. By

assuming this role, the PREPS staff member joins the school as a team member in a supportive role with the local district's needs as the paramount concern.

Second, there must be an ongoing, interactional relationship in which the PREPS staff and the local decision makers can communicate. This relationship must always assure that the local school is in charge of making decisions, but the PREPS central staff wishes to be consistently involved in that process. By establishing and fostering the primary contact within the district with the superintendent, communication problems are minimized. The best way to grasp PREPS relationship to the schools is that the organization is constantly on call to its members to address whatever the local school feels if important.

Third, there must be a local district commitment in terms of money and personnel. Although many might feel that federal funding would make the program go smoother, this fact is not supported by the action of the members. The districts that have joined PREPS put their own money into the program and have a high expectation for the results of the program. Therefore, the districts continue to be willing to participate and cooperate in a fashion that has led to a successful program.

Fourth, the PREPS organization uses a task force approach on each problem. If one person is allowed to carry the entire weight of the program, then too many opportunities for failure would exist. No one person can adequately respond to all situations. By using a task force of several persons from both the University and the local level, the quality of the results are enhanced. One should not misunderstand the difference in assigning to one local staff member the administrative responsibility for a project and having another staff member totally conduct the project.

Other institutions of higher education and other local school districts may wonder if the PREPS model would be beneficial to them. To the school districts, the answer is rather simple. If a district cannot afford its own research and evaluation unit, but needs data to aid in the decision-making process, the PREPS approach is the most efficient and effective alternative. Such an ongoing relationship with other school districts can provide a strong foundation for a self-renewing capacity.

To the universities, the answer is also relatively simple, but it has more parts. First, our university has a commitment to service. Unfortunately, many universities have overlooked the potential of providing research and evaluation services to public schools. Therefore, where these types of services have been provided, it has largely been uncoordinated and directed toward the concerns of a particular faculty member.

Second, most universities are seeking to stimulate new research activities among their faculties. What more fertile field could exist for arousing interest in research than addressing the pressing needs of the public schools? It is understood that education is in dire need of sound basic research into the theories that serve as the foundations for our educational practices. However, until a researcher can first understand the true situation which exists in our educational system, it will be difficult to identify these concerns which might be classified as basic. By working in a program such as PREPS, one can acquire this necessary experience.

Third, as the staff from the university meets public school officials in a service role, valuable input can be gained for use in making pre-service teacher education programs more effective. If universities are to take their teacher training commitment seriously, one key factor must be feedback on an ongoing basis from the consumers of their products, the schools.

Fourth, student enrollment is decreasing and higher education is faced with at least no growth if not an actual decline in staff. The PREPS model allows a university to acquire new financial resources which can aid in maintaining and developing a strong faculty by assigning a portion of a faculty member's time to the PREPS operation.

CONCLUSION

Educators have sought for years to determine ways of bringing about change and several successful models have been developed. Each model recognizes the need for good data in the decision-making process. But not all the models stress the need for decisions to be made at the local level. By utilizing the PREPS model, good data will be directed at the most important point in the organization, the local decision makers. Change may not be immediate nor will all school districts be interested in joining such a consortium. But PREPS is a model that could be a major step forward in facilitating better decision-making at the local elementary and secondary school district level.